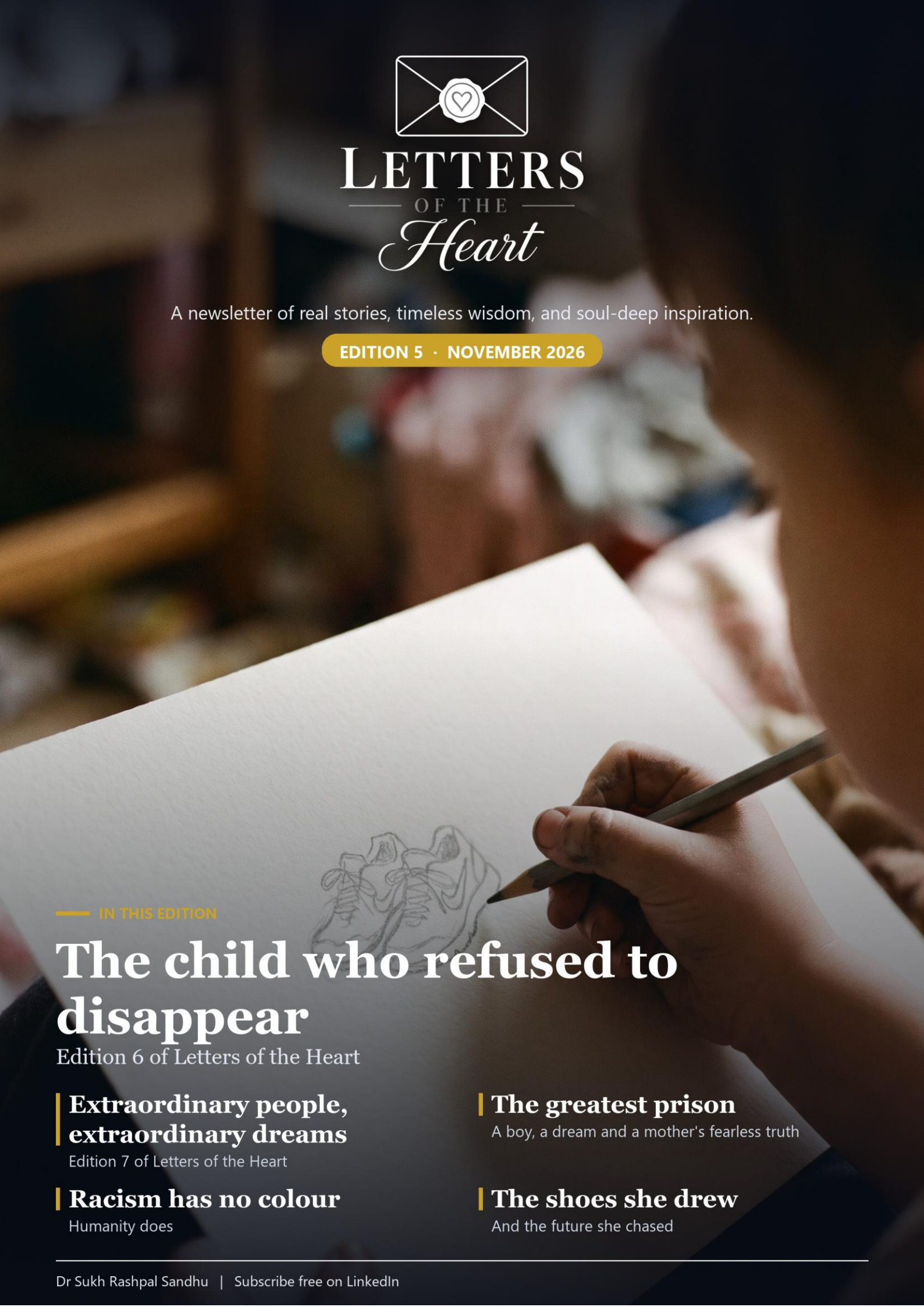


LETTERS OF THE Heart

A newsletter of real stories, timeless wisdom, and soul-deep inspiration.

EDITION 5 · NOVEMBER 2026

IN THIS EDITION

The child who refused to disappear

Edition 6 of Letters of the Heart

Extraordinary people, extraordinary dreams

Edition 7 of Letters of the Heart

The greatest prison

A boy, a dream and a mother's fearless truth

Racism has no colour

Humanity does

The shoes she drew

And the future she chased

Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | Subscribe free on LinkedIn

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INTRODUCTION

Letters of the Heart: November 2026

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu

Edition 5 of Letters of the Heart: 5 pieces for November 2026.

A newsletter of real stories, timeless wisdom, and soul-deep inspiration.

This edition brings together 5 pieces first published in Letters of the Heart on LinkedIn, each carrying the date it first appeared. Republished pieces appear as they were first published, with their original images; facts, figures and links are as they stood on that date.

In this edition

- Edition 6: The Child Who Refused to Disappear
- Letters of The Heart, Edition 7: Extraordinary People, Extraordinary Dreams
- The Greatest Prison: A Boy, a Dream, and a Mother's Fearless Truth
- Letters of the Heart | Special Edition: Racism Has No Colour. Humanity Does.
- Letters of the Heart: The Shoes She Drew, the Future She Chased.

Thank you to every reader who subscribes, shares and responds.

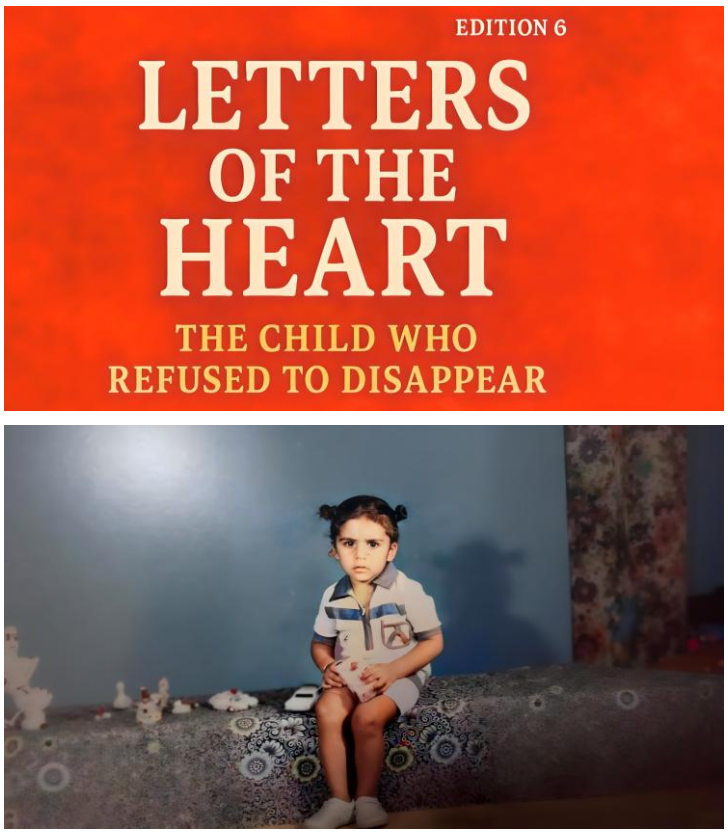
Warm regards,
Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu
Author, Letters of the Heart

LETTERS OF THE HEART

Edition 6: The Child Who Refused to Disappear

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 26 May 2025

Memory is not just what happened; it's what we choose to carry forward. This edition of **Letters of the Heart** represents something different from all previous collections: a deliberate journey into the moments that didn't just happen to me but that happened for me.



Memory is not just what happened; it's what we choose to carry forward. This edition of **Letters of the Heart** represents something different from all previous collections: a deliberate journey into the moments that didn't just happen to me but that happened for me. These ten stories from childhood aren't simply recollections; they're revelations about how a young soul learns to navigate a world that often prefers its dreamers quiet and its performers predictable.

What began as an exploration of childhood memories became something far more profound: a masterclass in resilience written by a boy who didn't yet know he was teaching himself how to rise. From a two-year-old walking into his first classroom to a teenager choosing grace over grudges, these stories chronicle the formation of character in real time. They reveal the beautiful truth that our most defining moments often happen before we're old enough to understand their significance, but never before we're brave enough to live them fully.

Each story in this collection examines a different facet of courage: the courage to stand out, to cross boundaries, to survive the unthinkable, to demand respect, to forgive betrayal, and to

keep dancing when the music stops. But woven through them all is a deeper narrative about the power of authentic expression and the people who nurture it. These aren't just stories about performance; they're stories about becoming, becoming confident enough to trust your difference, strong enough to weather criticism, and wise enough to choose love over fear, again and again.

If you're reading this as someone who has ever felt too different, too sensitive, or too much, these stories are for you. They're proof that the very qualities that make you feel like an outsider might be exactly what the world needs most. That the stages you're afraid to step onto are often the ones where you'll discover who you really are. And that the people who believe in you when you can't believe in yourself aren't just supporters, they're architects of miracles.

These memories remind us that we all begin somewhere uncertain, somewhere smaller than our dreams deserve. But it's not the size of the beginning that matters; it's the size of the heart that refuses to let the story end there. Because every master was once a beginner, every leader was once overlooked, and every legend was once just a child with an unshakeable belief that they had something beautiful to share with the world.

Sukh Sandhu

The Boy Who Remembered Everything



I am in the top row, second from the right.

Some people remember stories.

I remember **moments**.

Sharp. Vivid. Unshakable.

I remember walking into a classroom when I was just **two years old**.

Most people don't believe me when I say that, but when you carry moments that shape you, they don't fade. They stay. Like photographs in your bones.

Back then, my mother was the **Head of Nurses** at a government hospital.

My father was running his businesses.

And life was… busy. Demanding. Unforgiving.

My **grandmother**, a woman with infinite warmth and wisdom, often came to help. But she also had five sons (two lost too soon). So for my **working mother**, juggling everything meant one solution:

Pre-school. And day boarding.

I wasn't even three.

And suddenly, I was **in a uniform**, bag on my back, entering a world bigger than me.

That school was called **Rama Krishna Model School** in **Fatehabad, Haryana**.

I was the only **Sikh boy** in my class.

Hair tied. Dastar neat. Eyes wide.

There had been two of us at first, but the other student left.

So I stood out. Alone.

I wasn't bullied. But I was *watched*.

Our principal, an **exceptional educator** with years of experience, once said something that has stayed with me to this day.

She pulled my mother aside and said,

"In my career, I've rarely seen Sikh boys this interested in studies."

Not out of malice.

Just old assumptions.

My mother?

She just smiled.

"Wait till the results," she said.

And sure enough, **I came first.**

Not just once. Again. And again.

The same principal who once assumed, now admired.

One day she told my mother,

"You really can't judge a book by its cover, can you?"

That moment meant everything.

Because even then, I understood what it meant to be **underestimated**.

That classroom taught me more than letters and numbers.

It taught me that our differences aren't limitations.

They're **power**.

It taught me that **being the only one** doesn't make you weaker.

It makes you **unforgettable**.

It taught me that assumptions crumble in the face of quiet, consistent excellence.

Today, when I speak on global stages, lead initiatives, or guide future leaders, I carry with me the **2-year-old Sikh boy** who walked into school early, stood out silently, and rose by **doing what no one expected**.

Because we all begin somewhere.

And sometimes…

Our first victories aren't shouted. They're **earned quietly**.

🫣 *I don't remember everything. Only the things I choose to remember.*

And this?

I'll remember forever.

Because it's not just a memory.

It's **where I began becoming me**.

Never let assumptions define your potential. Being different is not a burden, it's a bold advantage. Quiet persistence can outshine loud expectations. True strength is built when you're underestimated. Excellence speaks a language that prejudice cannot silence. Every child who stands alone is standing on the edge of transformation.

The Day Mamma Danced With Me



I was six years old.

Just a little boy with big dreams and restless feet.

Our school had announced a **dance competition**, one that would bring together hundreds, maybe thousands, from across the district.

Only **three** would be chosen.

And I wanted in.

But there was a catch.

We were a **traditional family**, and back then, the idea of boys dancing, especially in public, wasn't exactly celebrated.

I was nervous. Unsure.

But I still remember the moment I told Mamma.

And how she didn't flinch.

She didn't say, *"What will people say?"*

She didn't say, *"Maybe next year."*

She simply said, **"Show me your steps."**

And then… she danced **with me**.

In the kitchen. In the veranda. In the hallway between laundry and homework.

Whenever I got tired, she'd laugh and say,

"Champions rest. They don't quit."

Whenever I forgot the moves, she'd spin me around and say,

"If you remember the joy, your feet will follow."

We didn't have choreographers. Or fancy mirrors. Or training floors.

We had **Mamma**, a transistor playing old tunes, and love that echoed through every beat.

Then came **Independence Day**.

The **Panchayat Bhawan** was full, every seat taken.

So many schools. So many children.

Only three spots.

I was shaking backstage.

But I thought of Mamma.

Dancing barefoot in our living room. Laughing at my clumsy twirls.

I took a deep breath.

And I danced.

When the winners were announced…

I heard my name.

I had been selected.

Out of thousands.

But that wasn't all.

I didn't just get a certificate.

I won **my first trophy**.

I won **my first standing ovation**.

And more than anything, I won **my confidence**.

That little event in a community hall might seem small today.

But to six-year-old me?

It was everything.

Because it taught me that:

- **Joy is louder than judgment**.
- **Courage begins with one "yes" from someone who believes in you**.
- And sometimes the most powerful coach you'll ever have… Is your **mother twirling in the kitchen**, showing you how to rise with grace.

Years later, I've stood on global stages. Advised billion-dollar companies. Earned awards, led teams, built brands.

But whenever I feel that old flicker of fear, I go back to the day Mamma danced with me.

And suddenly, I'm six again.

Fearless. Free. And ready.

> *The courage to dream often begins with a single person who refuses to laugh at your hope. This story isn't just about a boy dancing, it's about a mother who refused to let tradition clip her child's wings. It's a lesson in how one quiet "yes" in the kitchen can become a roar on stage. When someone believes in you enough to dance beside you, even before the world sees your worth, that love becomes your launchpad. We don't need perfect mentors, we need people who remind us, "If it brings you joy, you're already on the right step."*

The Role I Wasn't Meant to Play



I grew up surrounded by a world of expectations, each one shaping the path before me.

In our home, **discipline was tradition** and **respect meant silence**, especially for children who dared to dream differently.

Papa didn't believe in cultural programs.

To him, dancing or acting wasn't a future. It wasn't "manly." And it certainly wasn't something his son should be wasting time on.

And in our society?

They didn't just whisper. They **mocked**. They laughed. They used words that cut deeper than most wounds ever could.

But something in me refused to shrink.

I was barely a teenager when an opportunity came, The **lead male actor** of a drama couldn't perform. The team was scrambling.

Without thinking, without flinching, I stepped forward.

"I'll do it."

They looked confused.

I wasn't asking to play the male role.

I was asking to play **the female lead**.

A decision that sent shockwaves, first through the rehearsal room, then later… through **my entire family**.

When Mamma found out, she didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

It took days of negotiation, but eventually, she agreed.

Quietly. Cautiously.

We didn't tell Papa.

And for weeks, I rehearsed in borrowed clothes and borrowed time.

I learnt every gesture. Every expression. Every silence.

I wasn't mocking womanhood.

I was honouring the role. Honouring art. Honouring the truth that **performance has no gender, only heart.**

Then Papa found out.

The day before the final shoot.

He was **furious**.

His voice thundered through the house.

"Stop everything. Enough is enough."

But the performance was in two days.

I folded my hands and said softly,

"Let me finish what I started. After this, I promise, no more."

Those last two days, I poured every drop of myself into that role.

And when the curtains closed, the entire team was in awe.

They didn't ask.

They announced:

"We're coming back next year, with the same cast."

And I had to walk up and tell them… I couldn't.

I explained why. I kept it simple.

One of the MCs, holding back emotion, called me to the stage.

"Tonight," he said, "we award *Sukh (Ladi)* with the Brilliant Acting Honour."

"He may not be with us next year, but this… this was unforgettable."

The applause thundered.

But I?

I cried.

Not because I was sad.

Because I knew it was over.

Later that night, people came home.

Neighbours. Friends. Strangers.

To congratulate my parents. To tell them what a performance it was.

Papa didn't say a word.

But Mamma?

She stood tall in front of everyone.

And said, with the strength only mothers carry, "He will do what he loves. And I will support him."

That moment?

Felt like a second birth.

I learned then that **love doesn't always come loud**. Sometimes, it arrives **in a quiet rebellion**.

Sometimes, it looks like a mother standing between **you** and the world's judgment, And saying, **"He has the right to shine."**

That was all I needed.

Not permission.

Just someone's **faith**.

Years later, when people ask me what gave me the courage to speak up…

To perform…

To lead…

To live authentically…

I say,

"Once upon a time, I played a role I wasn't meant to. But in doing so, I found the person I was always meant to be."

And that?

Was the performance of a lifetime.

> *Dreams need one believer to become reality. Encouragement at the right moment can ignite a lifetime of confidence. Joy is a more powerful compass than fear. Tradition should never silence passion. The greatest teachers sometimes dance in kitchens, not classrooms.*

The Twenty Rupees That Changed My Life



By the late 1980s, I had already tasted a little fame.

Trophies lined the shelves. District and state-level performances became part of my school year. My name had started to mean something, on stage, in competitions, in community halls filled with applause.

But fame, I soon realised, isn't the same as value.

And then came the moment that changed everything.

A **local organisation** reached out. They were staging *Ram Leela* and the classic tale of *Prahlad*. This wasn't just a school show. This was serious. Public. Professional.

And for the first time in my life…

I was getting paid.

I played my role with every heartbeat I had. I didn't care if it was small, I made it meaningful. Because for me, every line was a chance. Every scene was a spotlight.

And when it was over, someone from the organising committee handed me a note.

Twenty rupees.

A crisp, ink-smelling, real currency note.

My **first salary**.

I held it like it was sacred. Because to me, it was.

It wasn't about the amount.

It was proof.

Proof that talent has worth. That art can feed. That what lights your soul can light up the world too.

I rushed home, full of joy.

I wanted to spend it.

Maybe sweets? Maybe comics?

But Mamma stopped me.

She smiled and said something I've never forgotten:

"No. These twenty rupees are not for spending. They are for remembering. You'll earn thousands, lakhs, even crores in your life. But these, these are your first wings."

She gave me some change instead and tucked that twenty into a small envelope.

We saved it.

It stayed with us for years.

And even when I crossed six-figure salaries, earned hundreds of thousands of dollars, worked with Fortune 500 brands, billion-dollar clients, and led global campaigns, I never let go of those **twenty rupees**.

Because they weren't money.

They were **a mirror**.

A reminder that if you keep evolving, improving, and performing with heart, people will notice. Opportunities will come. Stages will call.

From that second onward, I was *hungry*.

Not for fame.

But for **performance**.

For **roles that stirred me**.

For **moments where I could disappear into a character and come out reborn**.

That became my motto:

"Give me a role I love, and I'll give it everything I've got."

And that's the thing about beginnings.

They may be small. Quiet. Easily missed by the world.

But to the one who lives them?

They become legend.

So when people ask where it all started…

I smile.

And say:

"In a crowded Ram Leela tent, in a borrowed costume, with twenty rupees and a heart full of fire."

> *This moment reminds us that it’s not the size of the reward, but the weight of its meaning. That crisp twenty-rupee note wasn’t payment, it was proof that passion can have purpose, that art can be seen, and that the first time you're paid for being yourself changes everything. This isn’t just a memory, it’s a declaration: your dreams are valid, your voice has value, and even the smallest beginnings can mark the start of an unstoppable journey. Those twenty rupees weren’t currency, they were prophecy.*

"Once More!", The Performance They Tried to Stop



Sometimes, you're not just stepping onto a stage.

You're stepping into a storm.

The event was last-minute.

A local cultural festival, big crowd, high energy, everything running behind schedule.

Someone had pulled out.

I was asked to step in.

"Just one dance," they said. "Anything will do."

So I said yes.

I was young.

Prepared? Not fully.

But excited? Always.

I chose a Bollywood number.

Rhythmic. Uplifting. Expressive.

Not provocative. Just passionate.

It was a song I loved, a routine I'd rehearsed a hundred times in my head.

I didn't realise I was walking into **a battlefield of expectations**.

The stage lights came on.

Music started.

And within the first few beats, I saw it.

Frowns.

Whispers.

Men in the front row whispering to each other.

They weren't happy.

But I kept dancing. Because I hadn't yet understood **why**.

Then came the movement.

From the corner of my eye, I saw it.

Two of the organisers, walking briskly toward the DJ console.

One trying to motion at the photographer.

Another making his way toward the stage stairs.

My heart raced.

Was I doing something wrong?

But the DJ didn't stop the music.

The camera kept rolling.

And the people, oh, the people, they stood.

Not to leave.

To **shield**.

The crowd had felt it.

The joy.

The effort.

The love behind every step.

They **blocked** the organisers from interrupting me.

And I?

I kept dancing.

With everything I had.

Not for the trophy.

Not for the applause.

But for **myself**.

Because if this was going to be the last performance of the night, I'd make it one they'd remember.

As the final beat dropped and I held the pose…

A strange silence fell.

And then, someone from the organising team took the mic.

Cold. Measured.

"We apologise," they said, "for the *type* of performance that just happened."

No explanation. No context.

Just a quiet condemnation dressed as formality.

I didn't know what to do.

So I stepped off stage, eyes to the ground.

Tried to collect my things.

Slipped behind the curtain, ready to leave before the shame could catch up with me.

But then, I heard it.

A sound.

Growing. Loud. Unified.

"Once more! Once more! Once more!"

The same crowd who shielded me…

Was now demanding an encore.

I turned back to peek.

People had stood up from their seats.

Clapping.

Cheering.

Celebrating.

Not just the dance.

But the courage.

The defiance.

The refusal to be boxed into someone else's idea of *acceptable art*.

That night taught me something I never forgot:

Sometimes, your performance will threaten people who don't understand it. Sometimes, your light will discomfort those who prefer shadows.

But if your heart is in it…

If your soul is honest…

The audience will know.

And when they chant your name, or your song, or just scream *once more*, That's when you realise:

You didn't just perform.

You transformed.

So the next time the world tries to silence you…

Remember:

They tried to stop my music. They tried to freeze my moment. But the crowd said otherwise. And I danced anyway.

> *Sometimes joy itself is an act of resistance. Authentic expression will always disturb the rigid. Audiences feel truth even when authority tries to silence it. You don't need approval to belong, you need courage to show up. Let criticism be drowned out by the crowd that sees your soul.*

"I Didn't Take the Stage. I Took a Stand."



They say rejection teaches you resilience.

But sometimes, it also teaches you **respect.**

For years, I was part of a team that created magic on stage.

Performances.

Presentations.

Drama productions that people looked forward to.

I gave them my best, always.

Not for glory. Not even for the applause.

But because I believed in the art, in the purpose, in the people.

But when it came to a new show, something shifted.

A disagreement.

On something as fundamental as value.

The price I quoted wasn't outrageous. It was fair. Honest. Reflective of experience, effort, and hours spent perfecting my craft.

But they didn't agree.

They chose someone else for the main lead.

No problem, I thought. Maybe it wasn't meant to be.

But deep down?

It hurt.

Not because they chose someone else.

But because they didn't choose **me**, after all the years we'd built something *together*.

A week later, my phone rang.

A new organisation.

Fresh. Unknown. Barely on their second production.

They had heard of me and asked if I was available.

And before they even asked what my price was, they said, **"We'll honour your rate. You're worth it."**

I paused.

Not just because they were ready to pay.

But because of how they said it.

With **respect.**

I said yes.

But when I saw the team, so warm, so close-knit, so passionate, I knew something else.

That **this** wasn't about the money.

So I told them, *"You've honoured me. Let me honour you."*

And I reduced my price.

The event?

Was spectacular.

We didn't just perform.

We bonded.

We laughed, stayed late, solved problems, cheered each other on.

It wasn't just a show, it was a celebration.

And it reminded me of something no paycheck ever could:

Environment beats experience. Respect beats reputation. And working with the right people? That's the real spotlight.

Then came the twist.

The original group, the ones who had passed on me?

They reached out.

They offered **three times** the original amount I'd asked for.

Said they made a mistake.

Wanted me back for their next big show.

I took a breath.

And I said **no.**

Not with anger.

Not with ego.

But with clarity.

I said:

"It was never about the money. It was about the *value*. If you couldn't recognise it then, I don't need your recognition now."

And I meant it.

Because no price can match the **cost of being undervalued.**

That day I didn't just reclaim my voice as an artist.

I reclaimed it as a **person**.

So if you're ever faced with choosing between **what pays more** and **what feels right**, Remember:

Go where you're celebrated, not just tolerated. You're not just a performer. You're a presence. A force. A contribution.

Choose places that know the difference.

> *Value is not proven by price, but by principle. Know your worth and never settle for less than respect.Integrity may cost you gigs, but it earns you legacy. Where you're honoured, you don’t need to be hired, you’re invited. Sometimes, saying no is the most powerful way to say yes to yourself.*

"The Fall, the Silence, and the Dance Back to Life"



Life doesn't always test you on stages with curtains and applause.

Sometimes, it tests you in hallways drenched in fear.

At corners where no one's watching.

At moments when you're just a child, expected only to dream.

But instead, you're asked to survive.

I was **eight years old**.

A child studying at **Lord Mahavira Convent School**, still learning how to tie my shoes, still writing my name too big on lines too small.

We lived in the **hospital colony**, and our rickshaw came early, **6:30 AM sharp**.

I still remember the cool morning breeze, the faint smell of chalk and eucalyptus, the groggy silence before the bell.

I climbed the stairs to my classroom on the first floor.

That was when the world I knew... broke.

One man. Hanging from the ceiling. Still alive. Another, stabbed, his eyes begging for help. And a masked man standing over him with blood on his hands.

I couldn't breathe.

I ran, no, I stumbled, towards the stairs.

But the killer saw me.

He followed. And **with all his strength**, he **shoved me**.

I fell.

From the first floor.

I woke up **three days later**.

My body was bruised.

But what hurt more… was what came after.

The police came.

The questions came.

But **sleep** never came.

Because the nightmares?

They were wide awake.

I'd see his eyes in every window.

His shadow in every corner.

His mask in every face.

Weeks passed.

I stopped walking.

I stopped speaking.

And then… the **unthinkable**.

One day, left alone at home, **I was abused**.

By someone who was meant to protect.

I don't even remember screaming.

I just remember silence swallowing me whole.

Doctors said I wouldn't recover.

That **I might never walk again**.

And I believed them.

Because I couldn't even feel like a person anymore, let alone a boy.

I stayed in bed.

Still. Silent. Sunken.

But there was **one person** who refused to give up on me.

My **Mamma**.

Every day after her shifts, she'd come home, sit by my head, and hold my hand.

She wouldn't cry.

She would **talk**.

About all the things I loved.

About how she used to see the stars in my eyes.

She played my favourite music.

She begged me to dance with her.

I didn't move.

Until one day…

Madhuri Dixit came on screen, my childhood hero, all elegance and spark.

A song I loved.

A rhythm I remembered.

Something inside me **twitched**.

First a finger. Then a shoulder. Then a beat within my chest.

I moved.

The doctors couldn't believe it.

I kept trying.

I fell. I cried.

I got up.

Every single day… I tried.

Until **one day, I walked**.

And then I ran.

And then… I danced.

I had faced death.

Faced trauma. Faced betrayal.

But I had also faced **love**.

The kind of love that doesn't demand recovery on a timeline.

The kind that says, "Even if you don't move, I'm not leaving."

The kind that whispers, "You are still here. And that's enough."

Years later, when I walked back onto a real stage again…

No one knew what I had survived.

But I did.

And I danced. Not to impress. But because **movement** was my resurrection. **Expression** was my justice. **Art** was my answer.

So if you're reading this, thinking your pain is too much…

That your silence is too loud…

That your fall was too high…

Let me tell you:

There is life after the fall. There is healing after the hush. And yes, there is dance after the darkness.

Don't stop believing in your own return.

Because even broken wings… can rise again.

Healing isn't about speed

it's about love that stays.

Even broken spirits remember how to move again.

What breaks you can also reveal who truly believes in you.

You don't come back from trauma the same

but you can come back stronger.

Survival isn't the end of the story.

Movement, expression, and love are the chapters that follow.

"The Window I Broke, and the One I Opened"



I still remember the sound.

A sharp crack. Followed by silence. Then my heart pounding in my ears.

I was barely eleven years old when I broke a window.

It wasn't just any window, it was the headmaster's office. A cricket ball, a misjudged swing, and there it went, glass splintering like fragile dreams.

For a moment, time froze. I stood there, the bat trembling in my hands, as everyone else scattered like leaves in the wind. They ran from punishment. I couldn't move. Not because I was brave, but because I was terrified.

The school called home.

Everyone expected anger. Shame. Even expulsion.

But what came next shaped the rest of my life.

Mamma arrived, not with fury, but with understanding. She looked me in the eyes, bent down to my level, and asked one question:

"Did you tell the truth?"

I nodded. Swallowed hard. "Yes."

And then she smiled.

"You can break windows, but don't break your word."

She paid for the damage. I apologised to the headmaster. But that day, something far more valuable was repaired than a pane of glass.

That day, I understood what integrity meant.

That standing your ground, even in fear, is a form of strength.

That mistakes don't define us, what we do after them does.

Years later, I would break many more things, expectations, traditions, even my own limits.

I broke the belief that a small-town child couldn't lead.

I broke the silence around topics people were afraid to speak about.

I broke free from boxes the world tried to put me in.

But never again did I break my word.

That moment at eleven taught me something schoolbooks couldn't.

That you can stand in front of shattered glass, and still choose to build windows to let the light in.

So if you've broken something, your courage, your trust, your way, Don't run.

Stand there.

Own it.

Learn from it.

Because sometimes, what we break opens the window to who we're meant to become.

> *Mistakes are not failures, they are invitations to grow. Standing in the truth is more powerful than running from fear. Integrity is learned in moments of tension, not ease. You can break things and still be whole, as long as you keep your word. Every cracked pane can become a window into who you really are.*

"I Had No Training. But I Had Fire."



There are stages that call your name…

…and then there are stages that test your soul.

I still remember the day they announced the district cultural event. The theme? Traditional dance forms.

The room lit up with names of trained dancers. People who had been learning for years.

And then there was me.

No formal training. No academy. No guru.

Just rhythm in my blood. Just passion in my chest.

And a dream too stubborn to leave me alone.

When I told them I wanted to participate, a few laughed. A few paused. One even said, "You? But you don't know the steps."

I smiled.

And said, "Not yet."

What followed were the most intense weeks of my childhood.

I watched recordings. Read books. Practised in the middle of the night under a flickering tube light. Every time I stumbled, I started again. Every time my body said no, my spirit whispered yes.

The day of the performance arrived.

My heart was pounding like a drum.

I stepped onto the stage, not with the finesse of a trained dancer, but with the force of someone who had earned this moment.

And when the music started, I let go.

I didn't dance for medals. I danced for the child who was told he wasn't enough.

I danced for every untrained, unseen, uncelebrated performer waiting for a chance.

The audience sat in stunned silence.

And then… thunderous applause.

Some stood. Some cried. And many, many, came afterwards asking for one thing:

"Aapke paas uski recording hai? We want to show our children."

I had no degree in dance. But I had delivered a masterclass in determination.

Later, that video was shown in workshops, small schools, and even private lessons, used by trained teachers to inspire their students.

Because sometimes, you don't need a syllabus to set a stage on fire.

You just need the courage to show up, and the discipline to follow through.

That performance didn't just change what people thought of me.

It changed what I thought of myself.

It taught me that *talent is not always taught.*

Sometimes, it's remembered.

Sometimes, it's inherited.

Sometimes, it's born in silence, and explodes on stage.

So if you're waiting to be trained before you start?

Remember this:

The world doesn't need your certificate.

It needs your soul.

And a stage is just a floor… until someone like you makes it sacred.

> *Talent doesn't always need a tutor, it needs tenacity. The absence of formal tools doesn’t limit raw fire.If you're willing to learn, no door stays*

closed forever. Dedication can outpace pedigree. Show up with heart and let your hunger set the floor ablaze.

"Let Them Talk. I'll Let the Results Speak."



There are moments in life when the applause fades…

And the whispers grow louder.

I was doing what I loved, performing at cultural events, representing my school, winning awards, bringing pride to every corner I stepped into.

But with each round of applause, the silence of resentment deepened behind me.

Whispers turned into grumbles. Grumbles into protests.

And before I knew it, I wasn't just a performer. I was a problem.

They said I was getting *preferential treatment.*

That I was *hogging the spotlight.*

That *someone else* deserved a chance, just *anyone* but me.

Some of these voices were from seniors.

But the one that hurt the most?

Was a childhood friend.

Someone who once stood beside me in rehearsals… now stood in protest against me.

And still, the selection committee stood by me.

Not out of favouritism, but because of the years of performance, results, and awards. The work had been consistent. The wins had been earned.

But sometimes… even when you're right, you're tired of fighting.

So I stepped back.

I pulled my name from that year's cultural performances.

Let them go, I thought. Let them see what it's like to carry the weight.

The next event was 90 days away.

I registered instead as an *independent performer.*

Quietly. Privately. No spotlight. No announcements.

Let the others have their stage.

Let the noise take centre.

But life has its twists.

Two days before the event, I received a call.

The group from my school, the same one that pushed me out, had **withdrawn**.

No backup plan.

No time to train a new team.

Just one option: would I step in?

Would I perform?

Would I carry the flag, the same one some tried to tear down?

I had a choice to make.

I could walk in alone, as an individual.

Or walk back in as a representative of the very place that couldn't protect me.

I chose the latter.

Because I wasn't just dancing for applause anymore.

I was dancing for something bigger, for every child who's ever been sidelined by jealousy, politics, or fear.

And when I walked onto that stage…

I didn't carry resentment.

I carried resolve.

And I danced like I had something to prove, not to them, but to myself.

We won.

Not just the trophy.

But something greater.

The noise didn't vanish overnight. There were still critics, still whispers, still insecure souls trying to clip wings they couldn't understand.

But the air had shifted.

Because no one could deny one thing anymore:

I *showed up* when it mattered.

And I won with dignity.

No drama.

Just performance.

So if you're in a place right now where people are trying to rewrite your story?

Let them.

You keep writing new chapters.

Because talent can be challenged.

But truth?

It always finds its stage.

Sukh Sandhu

> *Let action be your reply to envy and noise. True talent doesn't demand the spotlight, it creates one. Grace under pressure reveals more than victory ever will. Success isn't about silencing critics, but outlasting them with excellence. Keep building while others talk. Your results will speak louder than their rumours.*

Conclusion

As I close this collection of childhood memories, I'm struck by how much our youngest selves know about who we're meant to become. That two-year-old who walked into a classroom and quietly excelled, that six-year-old who danced with his mother in the kitchen, that teenager who crossed gender lines for the sake of art they all carried seeds of the same truth: authenticity is not a destination you arrive at, but a practice you commit to, one brave moment at a time.

These stories span nearly a decade of childhood, but their lessons have shaped nearly four decades of life. Every boardroom I've entered, every stage I've commanded, every challenge I've faced, they all echo with the voices of these younger versions of myself, whispering the wisdom they learned when the stakes felt smaller but the courage required was just as immense. The boy who kept his word after breaking a window became the man who honours his commitments. The child who danced without formal training became the leader who innovates without permission. The young performer who chose grace over grudges became the person who understands that how you handle victory and betrayal defines you more than the victories and betrayals themselves.

But perhaps the most important lesson embedded in these memories is this: we are never too young to be brave, never too small to be significant, and never too different to be valuable. The world will try to convince you otherwise, it will whisper that you should wait, conform, or shrink to fit into boxes that were never built for your dreams. But these stories are proof that the stages that matter most are often the ones where you're the only one like you, where the lights are imperfect, where the audience doesn't yet understand what they're witnessing. Those are the stages where legends are born, not in spite of the obstacles, but because of how you choose to dance with them.

If these stories have taught me anything, it's that childhood doesn't end when we grow up, it lives on in every moment we choose wonder over cynicism, courage over comfort, and truth over the easier path. The child who remembered everything is still here, still watching, still believing that the next performance could change everything. And maybe, just maybe, it will.

Keep dancing. The world needs your rhythm.

Sukh Sandhu

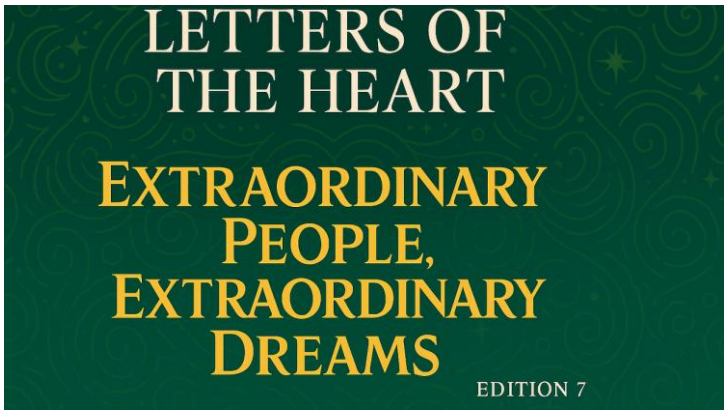
www.sukhsandhu.com

LETTERS OF THE HEART

Letters of The Heart, Edition 7: Extraordinary People, Extraordinary Dreams

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 15 June 2025

In every corner of the world, there are stories that remind us what it means to be human, to rise, to create, to defy the odds with a heart that refuses to surrender.



Dear Readers,

In every corner of the world, there are stories that remind us what it means to be human, to rise, to create, to defy the odds with a heart that refuses to surrender. In this seventh edition of Letters of The Heart, we celebrate ten extraordinary individuals whose lives are not defined by what they've lost or what the world told them was impossible. Instead, they are defined by what they've dared to imagine, what they've fought to achieve, and the boundless courage they've shown in rewriting the rules of possibility. Each of these individuals faced a moment when the world said, "You can't." And each responded with a resounding, "Watch me." Their stories are not just about overcoming, they're about redefining. They didn't adapt to the world; they forced the world to adapt to them. They didn't accept barriers; they dismantled them. They didn't seek permission to dream; they claimed their right to achieve.

As you read these stories, I invite you to ask yourself: What is my impossible? What barriers, real or imagined, stand between me and my dreams? These extraordinary people remind us that the human spirit is not bound by circumstance. It is not confined by disability, silenced by violence, or diminished by doubt. It is fueled by purpose, ignited by resilience, and amplified by love, for ourselves, for others, for the world we can build together.

This edition of Letters of The Heart is a love letter to that spirit. It's a call to action to see the potential in every struggle, to find the opportunity in every obstacle, and to honour the dreamers who show us that the heart, when it dares to beat boldly, can change everything.

Let their stories light your way. Let their courage lift your wings. And let your heart write the next chapter of what's possible.

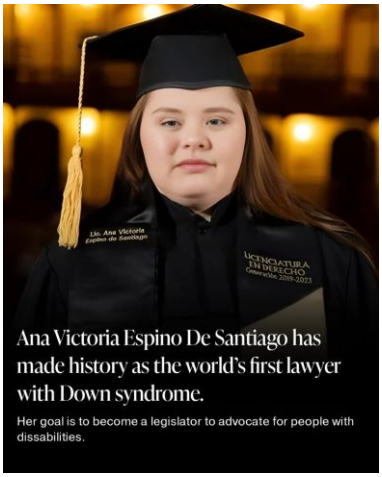
With unwavering belief in you,

Sukh Sandhu www.sukhsandhu.com Letters of The Heart

The Lawyer Who Rewrote What's Possible

Ana Victoria Espino de Santiago

Some dreams are so bold that they redefine reality itself.



In Zacatecas, Mexico, a little girl was born with a diagnosis that most people misunderstood.

Down Syndrome.

Some said she would never learn. Others said she wouldn't speak clearly. A few didn't expect her to finish school at all.

But Ana Victoria Espino de Santiago had other plans.

She didn't just finish school. She finished **law school**.

At 25, she became one of the first known Latina women with Down Syndrome to earn a law degree.

She studied online. She worked through screens. She was supported by a shadow teacher, one of the few who saw her mind before her label.

Every test was a protest. Every paper was a promise. Every class passed was a future rewritten.

But Ana Victoria didn't stop at graduation.

She spoke at legislative forums. Displayed her art in international exhibitions. Partnered with disability rights groups in Spain, Chile, and Peru.

She built bridges in the places where walls had stood for years.



Her next goal?

To become a **lawmaker**.

Not just to use the law, but to **change it**.

"I didn't graduate law school just to practice law," she says. "I graduated to change the laws that determine who gets to dream."

She saw an education system that left people behind, and stepped forward anyway. She entered a courtroom no one thought she'd belong in, and sat at the table. She found doors that were shut, and carved new ones through stone.

This isn't just about a degree. It's about dignity. It's about daring to ask the world for more than what it offers by default.

They said she wouldn't learn. She became a lawyer. She's planning to lead change from inside the system.

Ana Victoria didn't just break a barrier. She **rebuilt the rules**.

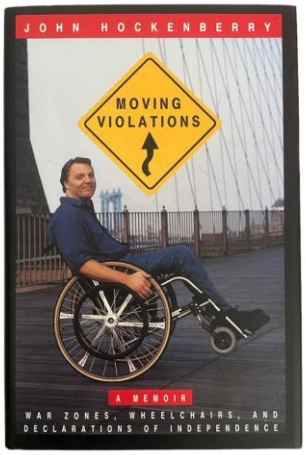
And now, thousands of others will rise because she refused to sit quietly.

Let the world remember: The law is not finished being written, and neither is she.

The Reporter Who Refused to Stay Still

John Hockenberry

At 19, a car accident rewrote John Hockenberry's story in an instant.



At 19 years old, he was in a car. And then, he wasn't.

A crash left him paralysed from the chest down. Doctors said he'd never walk again. Some said his dreams would have to shrink.

But John Hockenberry refused to fold.

He didn't just rebuild his life. He **reimagined the boundaries of journalism**.

He entered a profession that chased stories through jungles, war zones, riots, and refugee camps, places where wheelchairs weren't just unexpected. They were unwelcome.

But John didn't flinch. He rolled in anyway.

He reported from **Middle Eastern battlefields**. From the frontlines of **wars**, not the safety of press rooms. From behind the **Berlin Wall** as it crumbled into history.

While others stayed back, John moved forward. Not on foot. But with force.

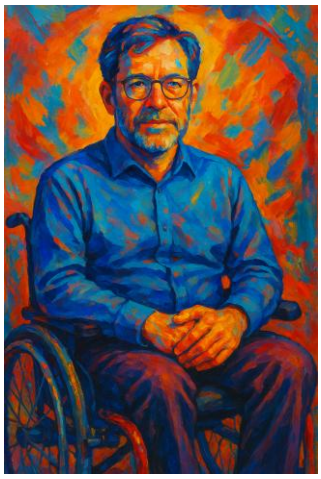
His wheelchair wasn't a barrier. It was his badge.

And the world took notice.

🎙️ Four Emmy Awards. 🏆 Two Peabody Awards. 🎧 Groundbreaking work on NPR, NBC, and ABC. 🎤 Host of *The Takeaway*, a voice that reached millions.

But behind the microphone was something deeper.

A man who turned limitation into leverage. A journalist who found stories **others missed**, not despite his disability, but **because of it**.



His memoir, *Moving Violations*, didn't ask for pity. It gave people a new lens.

A lens where adversity becomes access. Where perspective becomes power. Where being underestimated becomes your greatest advantage.

He once said, "I didn't lose my mobility. I gained perspective."

And that perspective reshaped everything.

John didn't report from the sidelines. He rewrote the field entirely.

He didn't ask for inclusion. He made it **impossible to ignore**.

📸 They saw a wheelchair. 🗺️ He saw a passport. 🖊️ He filed stories that proved: courage moves faster than legs ever could.

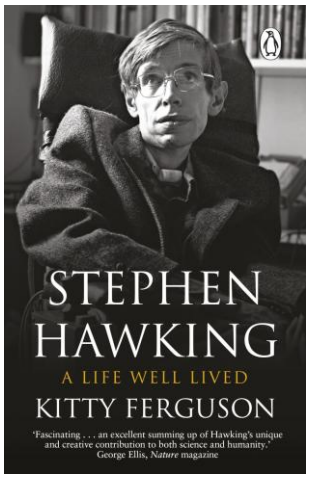
John Hockenberry didn't just refuse to stay still.

He became the reason others moved.

The Mind That Travelled the Universe

Stephen Hawking

Some minds don't follow the laws of gravity; they defy them completely.



At 21, he was told his universe would collapse.

ALS. A body doomed to silence. A life with just two years left.

Stephen Hawking heard the diagnosis and decided to rewrite the math.

The doctors understood the disease. But not the mind behind the eyes. Not the galaxies blooming in that brain.

As his muscles faded, his imagination expanded. As speech slipped away, the **cosmos got louder**.

He could no longer walk, nor talk, but the universe came to him anyway.

In his stillness, he found motion. In his silence, he made noise. And in the vast loneliness of space, he found connection.

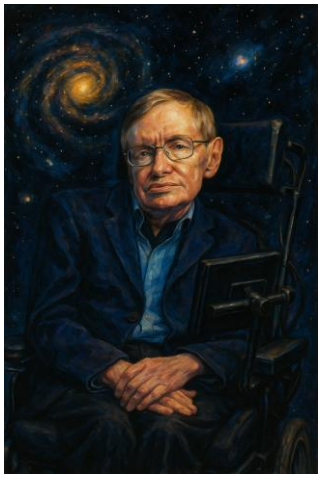
He discovered something no one had seen before: Black holes weren't empty. They **glowed**. They emitted energy. They whispered truths no telescope could capture.

The world named it **Hawking radiation**. But what they really discovered was **Hawking resolve**.

He dictated theories through a cheek muscle. Taught students who could move freely, while he remained still. Wrote with a computerised voice, and made the world listen.

📖 *A Brief History of Time* became a phenomenon. He made particle physics a dinner table topic. He turned gravitational collapse into coffee shop conversations.

But his greatest theory wasn't found in numbers. It was hidden in the days he refused to give up.



Stephen lived not two years, but **five decades** more. Falling in love. Raising children. Travelling the world. Asking the biggest questions of all: Why are we here? Where did we come from? What happens beyond the stars?

He rolled into lecture halls where gravity bowed to him. He stared down the abyss, and found wonder, not fear. He proved that a body may fail, But a brilliant mind can travel lightyears without leaving its chair.

🕳️ They gave him an expiration date. 🔭 He gave us a new way to look at time. 💡 He didn't just observe the universe, he reshaped how we **understand** it.

Stephen Hawking didn't escape his limitations. He used them as his launch code.

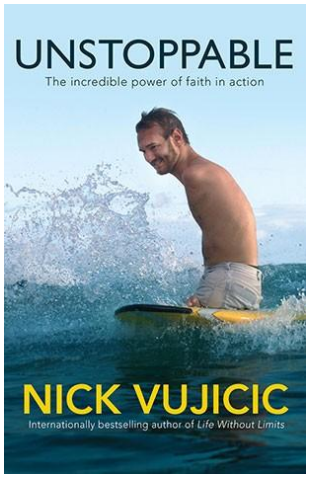
And when we gaze at the night sky, Trying to make sense of it all, We're really just following in the tracks of a man who taught us:

Where there is life, there is hope.

The Man Who Learned to Fly Without Wings

Nick Vujicic

Some souls are born to break every limit; even when the world expects none of them to rise.



In 1982, in a Melbourne hospital, a baby entered the world without arms or legs. No warning. No explanation. Just silence, heartbreak, and a question no one could answer: **What kind of life could this child possibly live?**

His name was **Nick Vujicic**. And from day one, his life was a rebellion against impossibility.

Doctors called it **tetra-amelia syndrome**. No limbs. No easy way forward. His parents wept. He would later say they also **believed**.

School was brutal. Children mocked him. Teachers didn't always know what to do with him. Strangers stared, or worse, looked away.

At ten, he tried to take his own life. A bathtub. A moment of stillness. A heart nearly ready to give up.

But something stopped him.

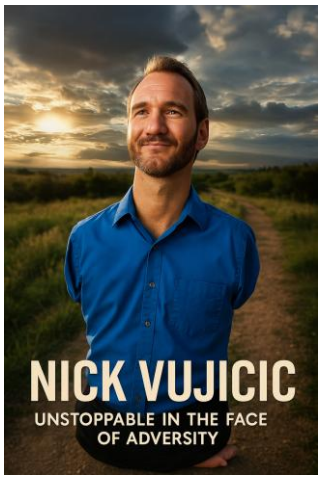
A whisper. A flicker of belief. A small, quiet truth that refused to die:

He was here for a reason.

Nick didn't just learn how to live. He learned how to **thrive**.

He wrote with toes. Typed with heels. Swam, skateboarded, surfed, and kicked a soccer ball better than most. He taught himself how to do the things the world said he couldn't, And then he taught the world something else:

Hope has no limbs. It only needs a voice.



He began speaking in schools. Then stadiums. Then nations.

Today, he's spoken to millions in over **75 countries**. To prisoners. To presidents. To orphans. To CEOs.

His non-profit, **Life Without Limbs**, doesn't offer sympathy. It offers transformation.

When Nick speaks, perched on a table, balanced on his hip, no arms, no legs, he is **electric**. He makes complaints vanish. Excuses dissolve. And for a moment, the audience forgets his body entirely, because his spirit fills the entire room.

"I may not have hands to hold," he tells them, "But I have a heart to love. I may not have feet to dance, But I have a spirit that soars."

He married. Became a father. Built a life louder than silence and more powerful than pain.

🗣️ He had no voice at first, now he echoes in stadiums. 🤌 He had no limbs, now he leads a movement. 💡 He was once seen as incomplete, now he helps others feel whole.

Nick Vujicic didn't climb over his challenges. He **lifted the world around him by refusing to accept them as final**.

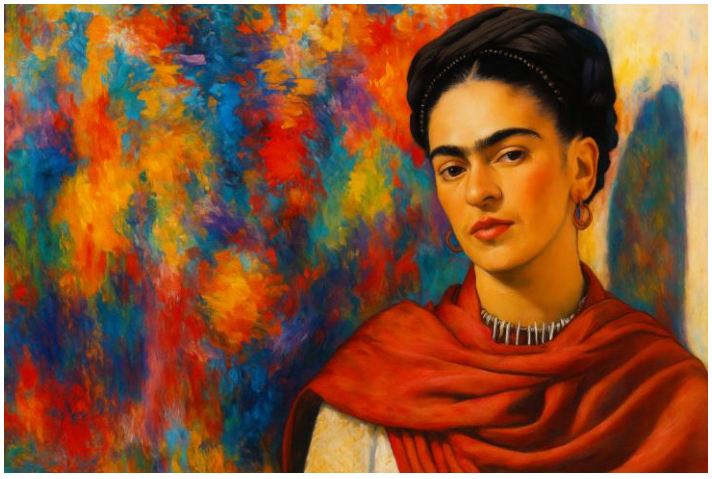
He proved something eternal:

The only real disability is believing you have none.

The Artist Who Painted Pain Into Power

Frida Kahlo

Some people survive pain. Frida turned it into a palette.



In 1907, in Coyoacán, Mexico, a girl was born beneath blue skies and a restless revolution.

Her name was **Frida Kahlo**.

At six, **polio** attacked her right leg. It left her walking with a limp and living with a secret, pain would be her lifelong companion.

But she still danced. She still dreamed. Until one afternoon, at eighteen, everything changed.

A bus collided with a streetcar. Metal pierced her pelvis. Her spine broke. Her ribs shattered. Her body, once vibrant, now lay still, cracked, crushed, and barely breathing.

More than **30 surgeries** followed. Each one a test. Each one a wound that wouldn't close.

Confined to her bed, silence surrounded her. So she picked up a brush. And spoke in colour.

Her mother built her an easel that let her paint lying down. A mirror above her. A canvas in front of her. And a fire inside her that refused to go out.

She didn't paint to escape pain. She painted **through** it.

🎨 "The Broken Column" showed her spine splintering like ancient stone. 🌹 "Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird" bled beauty and anguish. 🖼️ Dozens of works where her face stared back, saying: "I am hurting, and I am still here."

Her paintings weren't delicate. They were defiant. Not apologies, but **announcements**.

She wore Tehuana dresses not to hide her braces, but to celebrate her culture, her curves, her contradiction.

La Casa Azul became a gathering place for revolutionaries and romantics. Art spilled from the walls. Laughter clashed with politics. And Frida, half goddess, half survivor, presided over it all.

She loved fiercely. Fought boldly. Lived loudly.

And she made history.

🏅 The Louvre bought one of her paintings, the first by a Mexican artist. 🌍 Her work travelled the world, even when she could not.

Frida never asked for pity. She **demanded recognition**.

Not in spite of her brokenness, but **because of what she built with it**.

🖌️ She painted pain until it turned into power. 🩸 She showed the blood, the bone, the bruises, and dared to call it beautiful. 🔥 She never walked without pain again, but she never let that pain define her path.

"I paint my own reality," she once said.

And in that reality, perfection wasn't required. **Only truth.**

The Woman Who Found Light in Absolute Darkness

Helen Keller

Some people wait for light. Others become it.



At 19 months old, illness stole her world.

Silence. Darkness. Isolation. No sound. No sight. No words. Just touch, temperature, texture. A mind awake, with no way to speak.

Her name was **Helen Keller**. And for years, she lived in a wordless wilderness. Locked inside herself. Raging, screaming, thrashing against the nothingness.

Until one day, someone reached in.

Anne Sullivan. A teacher. A guide. A woman with her own darkness, and a torch in her hand.

She spelled **W-A-T-E-R** into Helen's palm, as cool water ran over her skin.

And something **ignited**.

That touch became meaning. That moment became history.

Helen understood. Everything had a name. Everything could be known.

The floodgates opened.

She learned **Braille**, devouring literature. She learned **sign language**, claiming her voice. She learned to **speak**, each word a victory over silence.

In 1904, she graduated **Radcliffe College**, with honours. The first deaf-blind person to do so. But her real work was just beginning.

Helen didn't seek the spotlight. She **became one**.

She wrote. She lectured. She travelled the world.

Not just as a disability advocate, But as a voice for **women**, for **workers**, for **justice**.

📚 She published books that opened minds. 🗣️ She gave speeches that stirred hearts. ⚖️ She shattered every assumption about what was possible for someone like her.

"Although the world is full of suffering," she once wrote, "It is also full of the **overcoming** of it."

She didn't just live in darkness. She **lit the way out** of it.

🧠 She showed the world that intelligence doesn't need eyes to see. 💬 That communication isn't bound by sound. 💡 That the spirit, when nurtured, can break through any wall.

Helen Keller wasn't a miracle.

She was a message: **We are not limited by what we lack. We are defined by what we dare.**

The Swimmer Who Turned Water Into Wings

Jessica Long

Some people are born to walk. She was born to fly through water.



In a Siberian orphanage, a baby girl waited. She had no fibulas. No ankles. No heels. Just soft limbs that couldn't bear weight, but carried something stronger.

Her name was **Tatiana Olegovna Kirillova**, but she would grow up as **Jessica Long**, adopted by an American family who chose **possibility over pity**.

At 18 months old, her legs were amputated below the knees.

Most saw that as a loss.

Her family saw it as a beginning.

They gave her prosthetic legs. She gave the world something back: A reason to believe.

Jessica didn't just learn to walk. She ran. She climbed. And then, she **discovered water**.

In the pool, gravity vanished. Judgement dissolved. What weighed her down on land lifted her up in liquid motion.

She wasn't bound. She was **reborn**.

At 12, she entered her first Paralympic Games in Athens.

She came home with **three gold medals**.

It wasn't luck. It wasn't sympathy. It was the start of one of the greatest careers in swimming history.

Over 20 Paralympic medals. Thirteen of them gold. World records shattered. Stereotypes demolished.

But her biggest victories didn't hang around her neck. They followed her footsteps, artificial though they may be.

She refused to hide her prosthetics. She showed the world that difference is not weakness, it is **design**.

She spoke openly. About pain. About identity. About finding beauty in what others called broken.

"My disability is not my limitation," she tells audiences. "It's my **launching pad**."

Every race she swam was a challenge. Not just to her competitors. But to a culture that still tries to define bodies by symmetry.

Jessica's body wasn't wrong. It was remarkable.

She cut through water like it remembered her. Moved through lanes like she belonged to them. And every stroke whispered the same truth:

Your obstacle might be your gift in disguise.

She didn't ask for pity. She earned respect. She didn't just swim. **She soared.**

Jessica Long isn't just a Paralympian. She is proof that the things that make us different are the very things that make us **extraordinary**.

The Girl Who Turned Bullets Into Books

Malala Yousafzai

They aimed to silence her. Instead, she became the sound of a generation rising.



She was 15. Riding home from school. Wearing her uniform. Carrying books. Speaking truth.

Her name was **Malala Yousafzai**, and her voice was a threat.

In the Swat Valley of Pakistan, under Taliban control, girls were told to stay silent, stay home, stay invisible.

Malala refused.

She blogged for the BBC. She went to school anyway. She believed education was not a privilege, but a right.

So they came for her.

A gunman boarded her school bus. Asked, "Who is Malala?" And shot her in the head.

They thought that was the end.

It wasn't.

She woke up in a hospital in the United Kingdom. Her skull fractured. Her hearing damaged. Her voice, **stronger than ever**.

That bullet didn't kill her. It launched her.

Malala could have chosen silence. She chose a **stage**.

She didn't disappear. She went global.

At 17, she became the **youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate** in history. But it wasn't the prize that mattered. It was the validation that a **teenage girl's voice could change the world**.

She founded the **Malala Fund**. She gave speeches at the UN. She studied at **Oxford**, proving that school was not just her cause. It was her future.

Her memoir, *I Am Malala*, became a global rallying cry.

She didn't just survive. She **transformed**.

🎓 The girl who nearly died for going to school… 📚 Now opens schools in places where girls are still told "no."

🎤 The teenager who was targeted for her voice… 📢 Now echoes in every classroom she's helped create.

Her Nobel speech said it best: "They thought the bullets would silence us. But they failed. And out of that silence came **thousands of voices**."

Malala's story proves something terrifying, and beautiful:

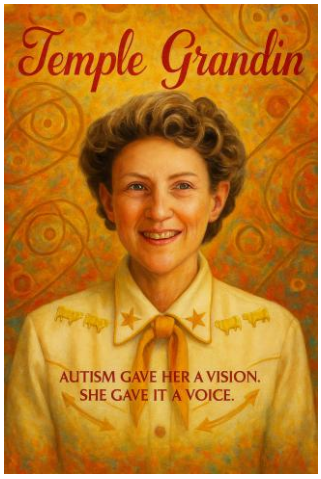
📖 Education is so powerful, some would kill to stop it. 💚 But courage? Courage **cannot be stopped**.

She is still a student. Still learning. Still rising. And still making sure **millions of girls rise with her**.

The Mind That Sees What Others Cannot

Temple Grandin

She wasn't born to fit in. She was born to redesign the world from the inside out.



In the 1950s, autism was a mystery.

Doctors didn't understand it. Teachers weren't trained for it. Society feared it.

And into that world came **Temple Grandin**, a child who didn't speak until she was four. A girl who screamed at loud noises. Cringed at the touch of fabric. Panicked in crowded rooms. And yet… saw everything in vivid, brilliant detail.

Her brain didn't think in words. It thought in **pictures**.

While others spoke in sentences, she built worlds in images. While others walked in straight lines, she saw **patterns no one else noticed**.

The world told her she was different. She decided to show them **why that was a gift**.

Animals became her mirror. Their sensitivities matched hers. The sound of a closing gate, the flicker of light, the feel of a shadow, things others ignored, meant **everything** to cattle.

She understood them. Not just emotionally. **Visually. Structurally. Intuitively.**

Temple Grandin became their translator. And she didn't just whisper for them, She redesigned the systems around them.

🐄 Her curved chutes. 🔧 Her humane handling designs. 🏭 Her low-stress facilities, now used in **over half of all cattle operations in North America**.

She didn't just change animal welfare. She **changed the industry**.

And she wasn't done.

Temple began to speak. About autism. About minds like hers. About what it meant to be misunderstood, and **brilliant**.

"The world needs all kinds of minds," she said. And the world finally started to listen.

Her books, *Thinking in Pictures* and *Animals in Translation*, opened eyes. Her lectures filled rooms. Her story became required reading for anyone trying to understand **neurodiversity**.

📚 Professor. 🎤 Speaker. 🏅 Time Magazine's list of the most influential people in the world.

Not despite autism. **Because of it.**

She proved that a different brain is not a broken one. That **focus, sensitivity, and visual thinking** are assets, not flaws.

She took what people labelled as "disability" And revealed it as **a dimension of brilliance**.

🧠 They told her she was limited. 🔬 She showed them a new way to see. 🌍 She didn't fit the world. So she **reimagined it**.

Temple Grandin is not a spokesperson for struggle. She is a blueprint for transformation.

The Surfer Who Turned Loss Into Legend

Bethany Hamilton

Some waves knock us down. Others show us what we're capable of standing up on.



She was 13. Golden-haired. Ocean-born. A rising star in Hawaii's surfing world.

Then a **14-foot tiger shark** changed everything.

It happened in seconds. A flash of teeth. A pull. A blur of blood in the water.

Bethany Hamilton lost **60% of her blood** and **her entire left arm**. Most people thought it was the end. The end of surfing. The end of movement. The end of the dream.

But Bethany asked just one thing:

When can I get back in the water?

Four weeks later, she was on her board again.

Not for therapy. Not for closure. To **surf**.

To ride the waves that almost ended her.

Learning to surf with one arm wasn't just hard, it was revolutionary. She had to relearn everything. The paddle. The pop-up. The balance. The fear.

She didn't just recover. She **rewrote the sport**.

She went **pro**. She competed against athletes with both arms, and beat many of them. She faced down **monster waves**. Waves taller than buildings. Waves with no mercy. Waves that now carried **purpose**.

Her story made headlines. Her memoir, *Soul Surfer*, hit bestseller lists. Hollywood turned her journey into a film.

But what came next was even more powerful.

Bethany became an **advocate for sharks**.

Yes, the very species that took her arm.

She told the world it wasn't about revenge. It was about **respect**. It was about **understanding nature**, not punishing it.

She chose education over fear. Conservation over hate.

🌊 The ocean that nearly ended her became the ocean that **defined her**.

🎤 She now speaks to thousands. 💗 She's a wife. A mother. A movement. 🏄‍♀️ Still surfing. Still pushing limits. Still rising.

Her story is not about what she lost. It's about what she **unlocked**.

🩸 She lost an arm. 🔥 She gained a fire. 🌍 She became a symbol of what happens when courage becomes your second limb.

Bethany Hamilton didn’t just get back on the board.

She turned tragedy into **transcendence**, and carved a new line across every wave that said:

“I’m still here. I still belong. And I am not done.”

As I close this collection of extraordinary lives, I'm overwhelmed by a profound truth: the human spirit is not fragile, it is indestructible. These ten souls faced moments that could have ended their stories, yet each chose to transform their deepest challenges into their greatest contributions to humanity. What strikes me most about these stories is not their individual triumphs, but their collective message: there is no such thing as a limitation that cannot be transcended by the right combination of determination, creativity, and refusal to accept "impossible" as final. Each person in this collection faced a moment when the world tried to write them off, when circumstances seemed to close all doors, when giving up would have been completely understandable. Instead, they chose to build new doors, create new possibilities, and redefine what extraordinary looks like.

These stories remind us that we live in a world that often mistakes different for less than, challenges for dead ends, and setbacks for permanent defeats. But these ten extraordinary people prove that our greatest contributions often emerge not despite our struggles, but because of how we choose to dance with them. They show us that courage isn't the absence of fear, it's the decision to let purpose be louder than pain, vision be stronger than limitations, and hope be more persistent than any obstacle.

If you're reading this while facing your own seemingly impossible circumstances, know this: you are already extraordinary, not for what you might overcome, but for what you're choosing to carry forward. The same force that drove Ana Victoria to law school, that pushed Stephen to explore black holes, that inspired Malala to return to advocacy after being shot, that force lives in you too. It's waiting for you to recognize that your current challenge might not be your dead end, but your launching pad.

The world needs your unique contribution. It needs the perspective that only comes from your specific journey, the solutions that only your mind can create, the inspiration that only your story can provide. Because in the end, these ten extraordinary people teach us the most beautiful truth of all: we don't become extraordinary by avoiding difficulty, we become extraordinary by choosing to let our difficulties reveal the magnificence that was always within us.

Keep rising. Your story isn't over, it's just getting to the most beautiful part.

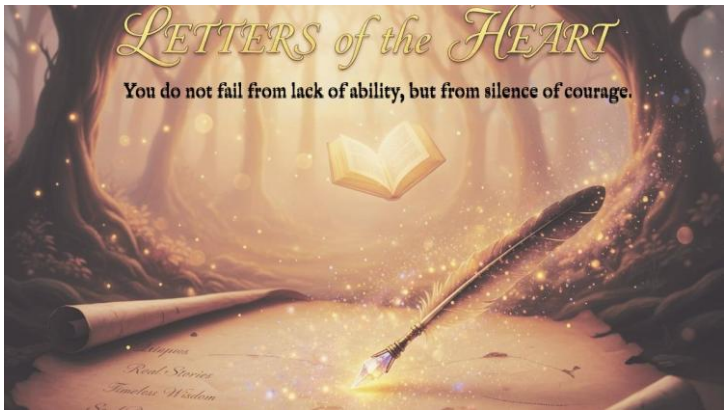
Sukh Sandhu

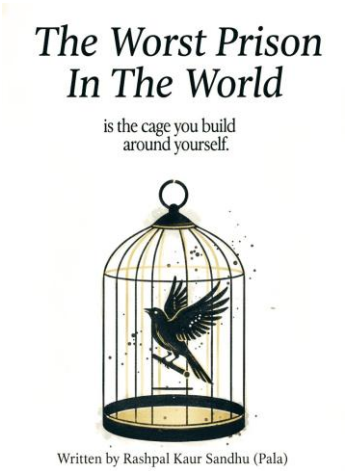
LETTERS OF THE HEART

The Greatest Prison: A Boy, a Dream, and a Mother's Fearless Truth

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 19 December 2025

The greatest prison is not made of iron bars or locked doors...





It is the moment you realise what you are capable of, and choose never to step into it...

I learned this long before I had words for it.

Growing up, Mamma used to tell me stories about where she came from. She would say it quietly, never with bitterness, never with resentment, just as a statement of truth. She came from a family of farmers. *Simple people.*Hardworking people. *People who knew the value of soil, sweat and seasons.*

But when I looked around her extended family, the contrast was impossible to ignore. *Deputy Chief Ministers. Royals. Families so wealthy that abundance was their default setting, not something they worked towards.* Power sat casually at their dinner tables. Influence followed their surnames. Privilege wrapped itself around their children before those children even understood what the world demanded in return.

As a child, I would ask her what went wrong. Why did life turn out so differently for her and her father.

She never spoke badly of anyone. She only spoke about choices, timing, courage and consequences.

Then she would look at me and say something that stayed with me forever. **In this world, your education, your skills, your attitude, and what you give to the world are the only things that truly belong to you.**Everything else is temporary. I am temporary. Your father is temporary. Friends come and go. Relatives drift in and out. **The only person you will live with from birth to death is yourself.**

That lesson was not philosophical for her. It was survival.

She started working very young. Not because she wanted independence, but because independence was the only way to exist with dignity. Through relentless effort, she became the Head of Nurses. **In a time when women were expected to obey, not lead.** In a time when authority belonged almost exclusively to men. In a time when rules were written to protect male comfort, not female ambition.

She used to tell me about attending grand celebrations organised by her extended family.

Lavish parties. Important guests. Powerful men.

Women who smiled politely and spoke only when spoken to.

She survived those spaces not because she belonged, but because she worked. Because she earned her place. Because she was self dependent.

Almost all the brothers and sisters of her father migrated to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada generations ago. She, too, was asked to migrate. **The offer came with a condition. She had to sign a declaration stating she would never sponsor her brothers or any other family members.**

She refused.

She said if I want to go abroad, I will go on my own terms, by my own effort, and I will not abandon my family to do it.

She was a sister to five brothers. Two died young. **The bonds she shared with them were deep, protective and unwavering.** Loyalty was not something she talked about. It was something she lived.

When I was twelve or thirteen, she told me it was time to start working.

I remember asking her for a computer. Computers had just entered our world. They felt magical. Powerful. Transformational. I told her it did not cost much.

She looked at me and asked a different question. Why do you want it. What will you do with it. How will it change you.

Then she said something that changed the trajectory of my life. **How about you learn how to make one. How about you first learn what you can do with it productively. How about you learn what you can achieve with it.**

She did not give me shortcuts. She gave me direction.

She encouraged me to choose a path of learning and working. A path that demanded rigorous training. A path where nothing was handed to you until you earned it. The organisation was responsible for work placement, but only after proving your worth.

I completed my training.

> *The first class I ever taught was a class of engineering students. I was teaching programming languages. I was young. I was nervous. I was six foot one, but inside I still felt like a boy pretending to be a man.*

That morning, Mamma said something that steadied me.

She told me about her early struggles. About lying awake at night wondering what life would have been like*if she had been born into another branch of the family. About the emotional weight of comparison. About how nursing, especially for women at that time, was not respected, not supported, not encouraged. She told me how she was one of the first women to step into that world, *where wards were ruled by men and obedience was expected from women.*

*She told me how policies were designed without women in mind.*How authority figures doubted her intellect, her resilience, her leadership. How she was spoken over, dismissed and underestimated.

And then she told me what she did instead of shrinking.

She studied. She passed. She showed up again and again. She refused to apologise for competence. She earned recognition from governments for her contribution to healthcare. She kept growing, not because it was easy, but because stopping would have meant accepting a cage she never agreed to enter.

She said something that morning that I still carry with me.

> *Do not create cages around yourself. Go fly. There is a huge sky waiting for you. If you fall, you will stand up. You will learn. But you must try. Give your one hundred percent. Only then are you allowed to decide if something is not for you. Do not let fear disguise itself as analysis. Do not let doubt cloud your judgement.*

And I did.

Things were difficult. Being young meant being doubted. Being different meant standing out. Being serious in a world that rewarded shortcuts came with its own loneliness. But none of it was impossible.

I loved teaching. I loved learning. I loved discovering what effort could unlock.

> *Every achievement I have today traces back to that lesson.* ***The refusal to live inside a self built prison.*** *The courage to test my limits instead of negotiating with my fears.*

The greatest prison is knowing what you are capable of and choosing comfort instead. Choosing silence. Choosing safety over growth.

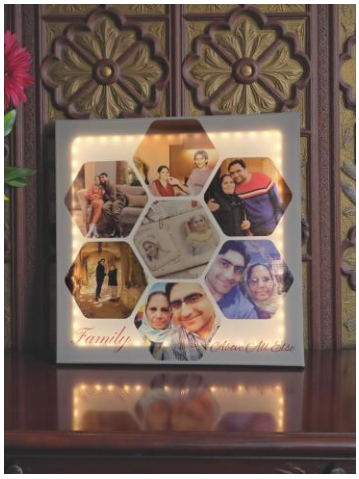
Mamma did not raise me to live safely. She raised me to live honestly.

And for that, every time I step forward instead of holding back, every time I speak instead of staying silent, every time I choose effort over excuse, I quietly thank her.

Because the sky is vast. And cages are optional.

When my own children were young, I shared this story with them, just as it was shared with me. Not to show them how great I am, but to pass on a lesson that shaped me, a lesson that helped me survive and thrive. I share it with you today in the same spirit, with the hope that it might resonate with you, or perhaps help your children as they navigate their own paths. The sky is vast, and the choice to step out of the cage is yours.

Awww how much I miss you... Thank you for everything.... Mamma.



LETTERS OF THE HEART

Letters of the Heart | Special Edition: Racism Has No Colour. Humanity Does.

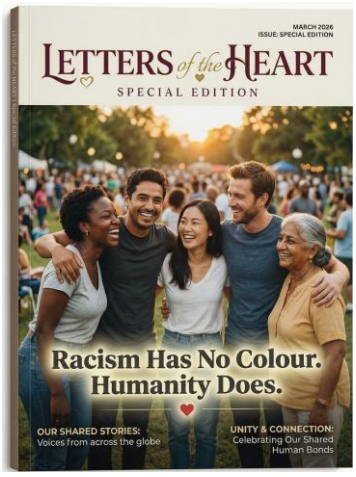
By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 18 March 2026

Note: Racism is the act of judging, excluding, or harming someone based not on their character, but on the colour of their skin, the accent in their voice, or the place they call home.



Note: Racism is the act of judging, excluding, or harming someone based not on their character, but on the colour of their skin, the accent in their voice, or the place they call home. It is a poison that seeps into our communities, convincing us that some people are less worthy of dignity and respect. Standing against it is not a choice, but a necessity. It requires the courage to speak up, even when the person perpetuating the hate is someone we know, a friend, a family member, or a colleague. Silence in these moments is complicity, and true change begins when we refuse to be bystanders, regardless of who is committing the injustice.

This is a **Special Edition** of ***Letters of the Heart*** because racism is not okay. It was never okay. It will never be okay. Not when it happens to someone who looks like you. Not when it happens to someone who does not. Not in your country. Not in theirs. Not in any corner of this world. This edition exists because too many of us stay comfortable in selective outrage, and it is time we held the mirror up to all of us, without exception.



They Looked at The Skin and Decided The Person Did Not Belong.

It could be a he. A she. A they. Anyone.

Not because of what they said.

Not because of what they did.

Not because of who they were.

Because of what they looked like.

That single moment, that one glance of contempt, that quiet decision to exclude someone before they even open their mouth, happens millions of times a day. Every single day. In every single country on this planet.

And most of us stay silent.

Not because we do not see it. But because it does not happen to "our kind." So we scroll past. We look away. We tell ourselves it is someone else's fight.

It is not.

It never was.

Racism is everywhere. And it wears more masks than we are willing to admit.

It is not only about the colour of your skin. It is about your accent. Your postcode. Your passport. Your mother tongue. The state you were born in. The country you migrated from. The food you carry to work. The God you pray to. The clothes you wear. The name on your birth certificate that someone refuses to pronounce because they never bothered to try.

A person from North India is mocked in South India. A person from South India is ridiculed in North India.

A Northerner in England is looked down upon by the South. A Southerner is stereotyped right back.

A person from Eastern Germany is dismissed in Western Germany. A Bavarian is the punchline elsewhere.

An Okinawan in mainland Japan faces quiet exclusion. A Korean in Japan faces louder exclusion.

A Bihari is targeted in Maharashtra. A North Eastern Indian is called a foreigner in their own country.

A Queenslander is mocked in Melbourne. A South Asian in Sydney is told to "go back where you came from."

A person from Southern Italy is stereotyped by the North. A Romanian in Rome is treated as less than.

A Uyghur in China is erased in plain sight. A Tibetan is told their culture does not exist.

An African student in Delhi fears walking home at night. An African student in Moscow fears the same.

A Moroccan in Paris is judged before they speak. A Turk in Berlin carries a label they never chose.

An Indigenous Australian fights for recognition on their own land. A First Nations Canadian fights the same battle.

A Mexican in Texas is told they do not belong. A Puerto Rican in New York is asked where they are "really" from.

A Haitian in the Dominican Republic is denied their humanity. A Rohingya in Myanmar is denied their existence.

A Tamil in Sri Lanka. A Kurd in Turkey. A Baloch in Pakistan. A Filipino worker in the Gulf treated as invisible.

A Maori in New Zealand still proving their worth. A Pacific Islander dismissed in their own region.

A White farmer in South Africa targeted for the colour of their skin. A Jewish student on a Western campus afraid to speak.

No country is exempt. No community is innocent.

This is not just racism between races.

This is racism between ***states***. Between ***countries***. Between ***cultures***. Between ***regions***. Between people who share the same nationality but treat each other like strangers because of a regional border, a dialect, a surname.

When someone is degraded, excluded, ridiculed, or harmed because of where they come from, what culture they carry, or what community they belong to, that is racism. Call it xenophobia, call it regionalism, call it prejudice. The wound is the same. The hate is the same. The damage is the same.

The World Justice Project found that 70% of countries saw discrimination worsen between 2021 and 2022. Since 2015, discrimination has increased in three fourths of the countries studied.

UNESCO's Global Outlook on Racism and Discrimination analysed over 600,000 articles and found that 34% of discrimination cases involved verbal abuse, 25% involved systematic discrimination, and 18% involved physical attacks.

Process that slowly.

This is not a problem that belongs to one race. This is a **human** crisis.

Racism is not a one way street.

When a Black person is called a slur, that is racism.

When a Brown person is mocked for their accent, that is racism.

When an Asian person is blamed for a virus, that is racism.

When a White person is targeted, abused, excluded, or attacked because of the colour of their skin, ***that is also racism***.

When an Indigenous person is told they do not belong in their own land, that is racism.

When a migrant child is bullied for their name, their food, their clothes, that is racism.

When a person of mixed heritage is told they are "not enough" of either side, that is racism.

When someone from a different state, region, or province is treated as lesser, that is racism.

When a person is reduced to a stereotype because of their country of origin, that is racism.

Every single one of these is racism. No exceptions. No qualifiers.

I say this as a man born in India, who worked in the United States, earned residency in Canada, and built a life in Australia over the past three decades. I speak 12 languages. I have sat in rooms across four continents. And I can tell you this with absolute clarity:

Racism does not discriminate. It does not care what passport you hold or what God you pray to.

But here is where we fail ourselves.

We have trained ourselves to see racism ***only*** when it fits our narrative.

When it happens to "our" people, we are outraged.

When it happens to "others," we look away.

When it happens to those we have decided are "privileged," we rationalise it, justify it, sometimes even celebrate it.

Sit with that.

What we tolerate defines us. Not what we condemn selectively.

A Pew Research study across 36 countries found that perceptions of racial and ethnic discrimination vary enormously depending on political leaning, income, and personal identity. In the United States, 64% of Black Americans, 36% of Hispanic Americans, and 23% of White Americans said racial discrimination is a very big problem.

Different experiences. Different lenses. But the pain of being reduced to your skin colour, your birthplace, or your culture is universal.

Racism is not just the grand gestures of systemic oppression (though those matter enormously). It is also the "small" cruelties we normalise:

The name calling.

The mimicking of accents.

The jokes about food, clothing, culture.

The assumptions about intelligence based on appearance.

The stereotyping of an entire community because of one headline.

The mocking of someone's English because it is their third or fourth language.

The targeting of a family because they moved from "that" state or "that" country.

The casual dismissal of someone's pain because "they cannot really experience racism."

The moment we start measuring whose suffering counts more, we have already lost the plot.

Let me be direct.

When racism happens to White people, and it is committed by Black, Brown, or any other group, that is still racism. Full stop.

You do not get to redefine the word based on who the victim is.

Hatred does not become acceptable because you believe the target has historical advantage. Pain does not become less real because the person experiencing it has a lighter complexion. Abuse does not become justified because of what someone's ancestors may or may not have done.

If we only call out racism when it suits our worldview, we are not fighting racism.

We are just picking sides.

And picking sides is not justice. It is convenience.

UN Secretary General António Guterres said it plainly: racism remains a poison that corrupts communities, blocks opportunities, and ruins lives.

He did not say it only poisons certain communities. He said ***our world***.

Because racism, in any direction, corrodes the fabric of human dignity.

In India, colourism destroys lives from within, and regionalism tears apart a nation that calls itself one.

In Australia, Indigenous communities still fight for basic recognition while migrants battle daily hostility.

In the United States, racial tension runs through every institution.

In Europe, migrants face hostility based on their origin, their language, their faith.

In Asia, ethnic minorities are marginalised in silence.

In Africa, tribal and ethnic divisions fuel exclusion and violence.

In the Middle East, migrant workers are treated as invisible.

No continent is innocent.

So here is what I believe, and what I will continue to say out loud.

Racism is wrong when it is done by White people to anyone.

Racism is wrong when it is done by Black people to anyone.

Racism is wrong when it is done by Brown people to anyone.

Racism is wrong when it is done by **anyone** to **anyone**.

The colour of the hand that hurts you does not change the nature of the wound.

We usually see what works for us.

Not what is right.

And that is not right.

A society that condemns racism selectively is a society that has not yet understood what racism truly is.

It is not about power dynamics, historical context, or academic theory alone. At its core, racism is the denial of someone's humanity based on the colour of their skin, the place they were born, or the culture they carry in their heart.

And that denial can come from any direction.

So here is my challenge to you.

The next time someone makes a joke about a race, a region, a culture, or a country, do not laugh. Ask yourself why it was said. Ask yourself what it normalises. Ask yourself what a child standing nearby will learn from your silence.

The next time you see someone targeted for their skin, their accent, their name, their origin, do not calculate whether they "deserve" your empathy based on who they are.

Just give it.

Because the day we start choosing who deserves dignity based on what they look like or where they come from, we have already become what we claim to stand against.

Racism will not end with laws alone. It will not end with hashtags. It will not end with one march or one speech.

It will end when ordinary people, in ordinary moments, make the extraordinary choice to say:

Not here. Not now. Not on my watch.

Not for your race. Not for my race.

For the human race.

That is the only side worth choosing.

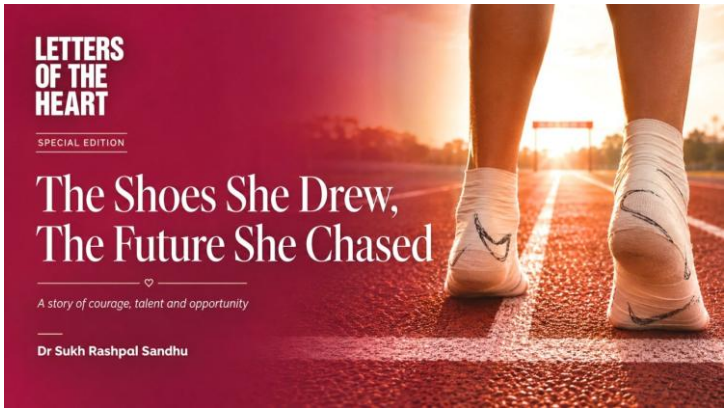
#Racism #Equality #HumanDignity #AntiRacism #SocialJustice #Inclusion #StandForEveryone #Leadership #SukhSandhu #UNESCO #UnitedNations #GlobalCitizen #Humanity #CourageToSpeakUp #RacismIsRacism #RegionalDiscrimination #Xenophobia #OneHumanRace

LETTERS OF THE HEART

Letters of the Heart: The Shoes She Drew, the Future She Chased.

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 30 August 2026

A special edition about courage, human potential and the opportunities every child deserves





Some stories reach the mind.

Others travel directly to the heart.

This is one of those stories.

In December 2019, an 11-year-old girl stood at the starting line of the Iloilo Schools Sports Council Meet in the Philippines.

Her name was Rhea Bullos.

Around her were young athletes preparing to compete. Some had proper running shoes. Others had access to the equipment normally associated with competitive sport.

Rhea did not.

Her feet were protected by improvised coverings made from elastic bandages, with strips of sanitary pads placed beneath the soles for cushioning. On the bandages, a Nike swoosh had been carefully drawn by hand.

They were not real running shoes.

But the courage inside them was real.

The talent was real.

The dream was real.

And when the race began, Rhea ran.

She did not run like someone asking for sympathy

Rhea did not step onto that track to become a symbol of hardship.

She stepped onto it to compete.

She ran with focus, determination and the confidence that can only come from hours of practice. She ran beyond the limitations that others might have seen when they looked at her feet.

By the end of the meet, Rhea had won five gold medals across track and field events. She was recognised as the most bemedalled athlete in the elementary girls category.

Her victories included the 400 metre, 800 metre and 1,500 metre races.

The image of her improvised footwear, originally shared by her trainer, Predirick Valenzuela, travelled around the world.

People saw the bandages.

They saw the hand-drawn logo.

They saw a child who did not have what most athletes would consider essential.

But they also saw something far more powerful.

They saw excellence refusing to wait for ideal circumstances.

The most important part of the story

It would be easy to describe Rhea's achievement simply as a heart-warming story about overcoming poverty.

But that interpretation is incomplete.

We should never romanticise deprivation.

A child should not have to run without proper footwear to prove that she is talented. A student should not have to study without books to demonstrate intelligence. A family should not have to endure hardship before society considers them worthy of support.

Rhea's story is not evidence that resources do not matter.

It is evidence that talent can exist even where resources are absent.

That distinction matters.

Determination helped Rhea cross the finish line, but determination should never be used as an excuse for denying children the support, safety and opportunities they deserve.

Her achievement invites us to ask a deeper question:

How many gifted children remain unseen because no one has provided them with the equipment, education, encouragement or opportunity needed to reveal what they can do?

For every Rhea whose story reaches the world, there may be thousands of children whose talent remains hidden.

Not because they lack ability.

Not because they lack ambition.

Not because they are unwilling to work.

But because opportunity never reached them.

Talent is universal, but opportunity is not

Human potential is not distributed according to postcode, income, social status or family background.

Talent can emerge in a remote village, a crowded city, an under-resourced school or a family struggling to meet its daily needs.

A future scientist may be sitting in a classroom without access to a laboratory.

A gifted writer may be growing up without books.

A talented musician may have never touched an instrument.

A future athlete may be running barefoot on an uneven field, unaware that the world contains stadiums built for people with her ability.

Potential is everywhere.

Opportunity is not.

That is one of the great injustices of our world.

We often celebrate people who succeed despite adversity. We call them resilient, courageous and extraordinary.

They deserve that recognition.

But celebration must be accompanied by responsibility.

We should not merely applaud people for overcoming barriers. We should also ask why those barriers existed and what we can do to remove them for the next person.

Someone must notice

After Rhea's story became widely known, individuals and organisations offered support. She and her teammates received proper shoes, clothing and sporting equipment.

That support mattered.

Not because it created Rhea's talent. The talent was already there.

It mattered because someone finally saw it.

Someone noticed the distance between her potential and her resources and decided to help close it.

This is how lives can change.

A teacher notices a student who has stopped participating.

A coach recognises ability in a child who has never received formal training.

A leader gives an opportunity to someone whose résumé does not reflect their true potential.

A colleague offers encouragement at the moment another person is ready to give up.

A community chooses to invest in its young people before their talent is lost.

Support does not always require enormous wealth or institutional power.

Sometimes it begins with paying attention.

Sometimes it begins with asking, "What is preventing this person from moving forward?"

Sometimes it begins with believing in someone before the evidence of their future success becomes obvious to everyone else.

The meaning of the hand-drawn swoosh

There is something deeply moving about that logo drawn across Rhea's bandages.

It represented something she did not physically possess, but could still imagine.

Perhaps that is what dreams often are.

They are pictures of a future we cannot yet touch.

They are symbols of places we have not yet reached.

They are promises we quietly make to ourselves before anyone else understands what we are trying to become.

Rhea could draw the symbol of a running shoe.

She could not manufacture the shoe itself.

But she could still run.

That hand-drawn swoosh has come to represent far more than a global sporting brand. It represents imagination in the face of limitation.

It tells us that before many achievements become visible, they first exist as belief.

A belief written on paper.

A goal written in a notebook.

A sketch on a wall.

A logo drawn on a bandage.

A child whispering, "One day," even when the world has not yet given her the tools to begin.

Our circumstances are a starting point, not a sentence

None of us chooses every condition into which we are born.

We do not choose our family's financial position, our early access to education, the resources available in our community or the obstacles placed before us.

These circumstances can influence our journey.

They can make the path longer, harder and less certain.

But they do not define the full measure of who we are or what we may become.

Rhea's story reminds us that a starting line is not a finishing line.

Where we begin does not always determine where we will arrive.

At the same time, we must be honest. Not everyone facing hardship receives recognition or assistance. Hard work does not automatically overcome every structural barrier. Courage alone cannot correct inequality.

That is why individual determination and collective responsibility must walk together.

People need the courage to pursue their dreams.

Society must have the conscience to ensure those dreams are not crushed by preventable disadvantage.

A lesson for leaders

Leadership is often discussed through the language of strategy, performance and results.

But at its heart, leadership is also the ability to recognise potential.

True leaders do not look only at what a person currently has. They look at what that person may become with the right support.

They do not confuse limited opportunity with limited ability.

They do not mistake a lack of resources for a lack of ambition.

They do not judge the runner by her shoes.

Whether we lead an organisation, a classroom, a family or a community, we have a responsibility to look beyond appearances.

The most capable person may not always have the most polished presentation.

The most innovative idea may not come from the most senior voice.

The most promising student may not have access to private tutoring.

The most determined athlete may be standing at the starting line with bandages around her feet.

Leadership means seeing what others overlook.

It means creating conditions in which people can demonstrate their abilities with dignity.

It means ensuring that success is not reserved only for those who begin with every advantage.

A lesson for education

Rhea reportedly dreamed not only of progressing in sport, but also of becoming a teacher.

There is something beautifully fitting about that ambition.

A teacher does more than provide information.

A teacher can help a child recognise possibilities that circumstances have hidden.

Education, at its best, is not merely the transfer of knowledge. It is the expansion of what a person believes is possible.

It gives language to dreams.

It develops confidence.

It creates pathways.

It helps individuals understand that the conditions surrounding them today do not have to become the boundaries of their future.

Every learner arrives with a story.

Some arrive with confidence and extensive support.

Others arrive carrying financial hardship, family responsibilities, trauma, uncertainty or years of being told that success belongs to someone else.

Our responsibility is not to lower expectations.

It is to provide the support that allows every learner to meet meaningful expectations.

Equity is not about giving everyone exactly the same thing.

It is about ensuring that every person has a genuine opportunity to participate, develop and succeed.

What are we prepared to do?

Stories like Rhea’s make us feel inspired.

But inspiration should lead somewhere.

It should move us from admiration to action.

We can mentor a young person.

We can support a school, sporting club or community organisation.

We can provide equipment, scholarships, work experience or professional guidance.

We can create inclusive recruitment and education practices.

We can advocate for systems that identify talent in communities too often overlooked.

We can ask whether the opportunities within our organisations are genuinely accessible or merely available to those who already know how to find them.

Most importantly, we can stop assuming that people who have less are capable of less.

A lack of opportunity is not a lack of potential.

A lack of resources is not a lack of intelligence.

A difficult beginning is not evidence of an unsuccessful future.

The finish line

Rhea Bullos became known around the world because she ran with bandages around her feet and returned with gold medals.

But perhaps the greatest lesson from her story is not simply that she won.

It is that her potential existed before the world noticed her.

The photographs did not create her courage.

The attention did not create her discipline.

The donations did not create her talent.

They revealed what had already been there.

That is why we must learn to look more carefully at the people around us.

There may be extraordinary ability hidden beneath ordinary circumstances.

There may be a powerful voice inside someone who has never been invited to speak.

There may be a leader waiting for one opportunity to demonstrate what they can do.

There may be a child standing at a starting line, ready to run, needing only someone to believe that her dream is worth supporting.

Rhea’s circumstances shaped her starting point.

They did not determine her finish.

Her story leaves us with a message that reaches far beyond sport:

Poverty may limit what a person possesses, but it must never be allowed to determine what they are permitted to dream.

Courage can begin the journey.

Talent can carry it forward.

But opportunity can change its destination.

Let us celebrate those who rise above difficult circumstances.

Let us also build a world in which children do not have to overcome preventable hardship before their potential is recognised.

Because every child deserves more than applause after crossing the finish line.

Every child deserves a fair chance at the starting line.

With heart,

Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu

Letters of the Heart, Special Edition

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